



Mojave Desert Land Trust

Preserving land to enjoy forever

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July 9, 2009

California Energy Commission
Clare Laufenberg Gallardo
1516 Ninth Street, MS 46
Sacramento, CA 95814

Sent by email claufenb@energy.state.ca.us

Subject: Response to RETI Phase2A, Victorville Meeting June 18, 2009

Dear Clare Laufenberg:

Thank you for the well planned and executed Victorville meeting. The information was clear and concise with sufficient time allowed for presentations, questions, comments, and one-on-one interactions with the staff. The day could have been long and difficult, but I found it informative and energizing.

Following up, I am providing comments on behalf of the Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) on the 29 Palms CREZ, an area of particular importance to the Mojave Desert Land Trust because it is directly within a wildlife linkage connecting Joshua Tree National Park with the 29 Palms Marine Base. This falls under our mission to protect the Mojave Desert ecosystem and cultural and scenic resources.

In addition to MDLT's work, there are two key partners that we work closely with here in the Morongo Basin – Joshua Tree National Park and MCAGCC (Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in 29 Palms, CA). These two federal entities provide the primary sources of the economy for the Morongo Basin. MCAGCC inputs more than \$600 million per year into our local economy, and Joshua Tree National Park receives more than 1.2 million visitors per year. The Marine Base and the National Park's missions are something that affects residents, jobs, visitors and business-owners directly.

MCAGCC, Joshua Tree National Park and MDLT have developed active partnerships to manage encroachment on both agencies' borders and under aviation corridors for the Marine base. Degradation of existing linkages directly impacts each of their missions, and the Land Trust's as well. Neither agency can afford to become an island ecosystem.

The conservation of wildlife linkages will relieve encroachment threats, provide for immigration and emigration between the mountain ranges and beyond, and anticipate movement of organisms as a result of climate change.

The science guiding our joint efforts includes the recently completed *A Linkage Design for the Joshua Tree-Twenty-nine Palms Connection* (December 2008) which Kristeen Penrod (South Coast Wildlands)

referenced during her DRECP presentation on *The California Desert Wildland Network*. Large scale solar installations within the linkage design would significantly impact its quality and compromise the long term goals of the connection. I was unaware that RETI and the EWG did not have this information and pleased that this lack has been remedied.

The Morongo Basin is a narrow fault controlled basin, you can drive through it in a half hour. From many places, the width of open, relatively intact desert is entirely visible. This uncluttered openness blends into the National Park foothills and the northern horizon. It is our invitation to the millions of travelers entering the Mojave to experience Joshua Tree National Park, the Mojave National Preserve, and the wilderness areas to the north and east. This uncluttered openness promises dark skies and clean air. To the travelers it says welcome: for the communities, the county, the businesses, and the residents it is the basis for our environmental values and working economy.

If large solar installations are built, the missions of the Marine Corps, the National Park, and the Land Trust will be compromised, the economy of the communities will be threatened, and the already threatened for our fragile wildlife ecosystems to survive the uncertainties of climate change will be degraded. Future permitting issues will include these environmental and economic impacts and the opposition of the affected groups. I am hopeful that the 29 Palms CREZ will be reevaluated in light of the new data and be dropped from the RETI and off map.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration. I look forward to the next Stakeholders call and future Public Meetings in the desert.

Sincerely,

Pat Flanagan

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Resource Advocate

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